

Relations

BEYOND ANTHROPOCENTRISM

6.2

NOVEMBER 2018

*Energy Ethics: Emerging Perspectives
in a Time of Transition*

Special Issue

Edited by Giovanni Frigo

Part II

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Contesting the Radical Monopoly

A Critical View on the Motorized Culture from a Cyclonaut Perspective

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DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.7358/rela-2018-002-delo>

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ABSTRACT

In our motorized societies, the “radical monopoly” (Illich) of the automobile is the evidence that our engine culture dominates. At the socio-technical level, we are all beginning to be “motorcentric”, in the same way that we are egocentric, ethnocentric, and anthropocentric. I argue that traveling on a bicycle – i.e. becoming a “cyclonaut” – engenders per se a decentering experience. It fosters a critical outlook on the norms and usages of engine culture. The cyclist perspective can provide a phenomenological experience that introduces levels of consciousness (sensitive, ethical and political), typically neglected in the status quo dominated by automobiles. The automobile radical monopoly contributes to the dependency on fossil fuels driving climate change. From an environmental virtue ethics standpoint, a cyclonaut’s experience promotes a new paradigm for mobility based on the re-appropriation of bodily-powered autonomous movement that broadens our social imagination and contributes to facing our current environmental crisis. It also promotes a positive shift in our value system that enables us to be an example of a richer experience. Contrary to the current irrational waste of energy, cycling can offer a joyfulness that reconnects us with the fundamental aspects of existence – self-awareness, connectivity to the world, nature, and beauty. This paper is based on reflections developed during the “Untaking Space Project”, a 6,000-mile philosophical cycling trip, from Miami to Vancouver, occurred between January and August 2016 (<http://www.usproject2016.com>).

Keywords: environmental ethics; environmental virtue ethics; field philosophy; automobile radical monopoly; motorcentrism; cyclonaut; ecological self; voluntary simplicity; mindfulness; ecotopies.

1. INTRODUCTION

In January 2016, I began a 7-month, 6000-mile philosophical cycling trip that would take me across North America from Miami to Vancouver¹. As a “field philosophy” (Frodeman and Briggie 2016) experiment, the “Untaking Space Project” was not only a personal adventure but a way to develop new perspectives over environmental philosophy issues, from a decentering experience: the experience of a traveling cyclist in a motor dominated society – what awarded Swiss writer and traveler Claude Marthaler calls a “cyclonaut’s” (Marthaler 2017) experience. What philosophical insights can a cyclonaut’s perspective provide to energy ethics?

In our motorized societies, the “radical monopoly” (Illich 1974, 45)² of the automobile is evidence that engine culture dominates. At the socio-technical level, we are all beginning to be motorcentric, in the same way that we are egocentric at a psychological level (Piaget and Inhelder 1966), ethnocentric at a cultural level (Lévi-Strauss 1952), and anthropocentric at a metaphysical and ethical level (Descola 2005; Callicott 2014). The analogy shows the same attitude: we value first and foremost what we are part of, what we identify ourselves with. Then, to reinforce this valuation, we stigmatize “the other” as necessarily inferior, less valuable, justifying our opposition, hatred and domination. The most interesting point in these various types of “centrism” is that they all start to be unconscious. Critical thinking aims to relativize such insularities. We – as members of modern Western societies – have so deeply incorporated the practical yet imaginary benefits of being transported by motorized vehicles, that we now fail to see the normative aspect of this car “driven” society. “L’idéologie sociale de la bagnole”, as Gorz ([1973] 2008) stated, has become a ruling pattern. The norms, values and creative abilities incorporated as *habitus* (Bourdieu 2001) become a second nature. We suffer from a “speed stunned imagination” as Illich precisely wrote in chapter 3 of *Energy and Equity* (1974, 23). Not only do we fail to envision ourselves out of the “habitual passenger” (Illich 1974, 24-5) role, but we fail to perceive the consequent narrowing of our social imagination. Today, we

¹ <https://usproject2016.com/>.

² “This profound control of the transportation industry over natural mobility constitutes a monopoly much more pervasive than either the commercial monopoly Ford might win over the automobile market, or the political monopoly car manufacturers might wield against the development of trains and buses. Because of its hidden, entrenched and structuring nature, I call this a *radical monopoly*. Any industry exercises this kind of deep-seated monopoly when it becomes the dominant means of satisfying needs that formerly occasioned a personal response” (45).

are mostly unable to conceive what was the norm in our societies only 50 years ago: that one could travel far away, long distances, cross country, by themselves, without an engine – with a bicycle, for instance.

I argue that travelling by bicycle is a decentering experience that offers a critical perspective on the norms and usages of our motorized culture. From a phenomenological perspective, it introduces levels of consciousness (sensitive, ethical and political) typically neglected in the *status quo* of the engine-dominated culture. The reappropriation of bodily powered autonomous movement allows potential shifts in our value systems. The cyclonaut therefore contributes to environmental virtue ethics by promoting a value-decentering subjective experience. Traveling as a cyclonaut creates an alternative value system and enhances new paradigms in social imagination. Contrary to the current irrational waste of energy, cycling can promote a joyfulness that reconnects us with the fundamental aspects of existence – self-awareness, connectivity to the world, nature, and beauty.

2. CRITICAL PERSPECTIVES

What are we typically neglecting due to our motorcentrism? And what kind of critical perspectives can traveling through the US as a cyclonaut's provide?

2.1. *"That energy you can develop!"*

The first obvious realization when I am traveling with my bicycle: I move mainly thanks to my bodily energy, and it is a long-lasting energy allowing me to move 8 to 12 hours a day – which I did not thought possible until experiencing it myself³. With such a physical effort, nutrition is crucial, as it is the main source of physiological energy. I mostly had a vegan diet: some cereals, fruits and nuts for breakfast, crisps, avocados, bananas and dry fruits for a quick lunch, 2 to 4 Clif® bars and lots of water during the day; then a big dinner based on soup and rice, tofu and "hippie dust"⁴ (and all available variations of this combination!). We can

³ Obviously, each body is different, and has its own limits. But my point is that we may usually underestimate the amount of energy a body can actually grow.

⁴ This is a nickname for nutritional yeast.

adapt ourselves for physical endurance, and as such the body develops an astonishing efficiency. As evolutionary biologist L. Liebenberg suggests, endurance may have been a key development ability for hominids to acquire techniques like *persistence hunting* and intelligence through the “art of tracking” (Liebenberg 1990, 62). I then realize as well that the meteorological conditions, the way I breathe, whether I was tensed or relaxed while cycling, the psychological aspect of motivation, the landscape, the traffic around me, are all parts of the energy I gather to move, in a very complex ecosystem. You can neither reduce food to your sole energy provider, nor reduce your available energy to food. Aside from nutritional qualities, food is a cultural product intertwining aesthetics, symbolic, technical, economic, political and moral relationships. Moreover, the vital energy at hand relies on a holistic process that includes, for humans, motivations, affects, breathing energy, and stress levels, all of which interact with the nutrients to make our own organism work.

2.2. *The organization of space*

Traveling by bicycle, especially on roads, quickly creates an awareness of the social organization of space. As a cyclist crossing the US, you mainly find yourself on shoulders turned into bike lanes, very rarely on bike trails dedicated to non-motorized vehicles, and sometimes on roads that have none of these facilities and are not at all organized to welcome cyclists. Obviously, the most comfortable situation is on bike trails, and the most dangerous is on roads without shoulders. But, during my trip, I was mainly a shoulder wanderer, a free-rider sidelined to the margin of the road – a space designed for the motor-vehicle, where the engine exerts its dominance. Here are three teachings from the shoulders.

First, one must face some aggressive, intentional or non-intentional, attitudes from roaring vehicles, especially when they are compelled to reduce their speed, or to wait before passing, in short, when they have to share the road with the cyclonaut. Honks, yelling, excessive bursts of speed, verbal outbursts, disregard for safety distances when passing and, once, a “rollin’ coal” are symptoms of aggressiveness, usually being a defense strategy against a disruptive element. We can have a psychological interpretation of those attitudes alleging drivers’ contingent and personal excess of tensions, stress and anger. But the “normality” of these reactions shows a sociological and structural defense strategy expressing the dominant normativity: the roads belong to motorized vehicles and they intend to rule the space. From a socialist perspective, Gorz denounced

“The selfish, aggressive and cruel driver, who every minute symbolically assassinates ‘others’, whom he perceives as material constraints and obstacles to his own speed” ([1973] 2008). I don’t know whether this can be interpreted as “the advent, a consequence of quotidian automobilism, of a universal bourgeois behavior” [“l’avènement, grâce à l’automobilisme quotidien, d’un comportement universellement bourgeois”] (Gorz [1973] 2008). But I agree that there is more than a mere contingent anger. As a cyclist, occupying the shoulders, you are contesting the motor vehicles’ “radical monopoly”. You are abnormal. You are an iconoclast. You are contesting an overpowering normative value system, and you don’t fit the normal social imagination. Therefore, you provoke some defensive response from the social body, and you become an opportunity to manifest what is there, latent: their fight for a motorized usage of the road that you seem to challenge. Delusion of domination through motorized power, external signs of virility and willingness to crush any kind of opposition: it has become a *topos* that powerful cars are signs of social distinction, and part of the social imaginary of virility. In this perspective, the roaring engine can appear as the typical “phallogocentrism” noise as Derrida brilliantly said, precisely exploring other margins, the “marges de la philosophie” (1972). By contrast, the vulnerability I feel as a cyclist facing this phallogocentric yelling reinforces the understanding of being a minority, being dominated, being abnormal. Which is an interesting experience: being a European white man and yet feeling what it is to deal with a dominant value system wanting, sometimes literally, to crush you.

Second teaching from the shoulders: as a margin-wanderer, I pay attention to what is there. I have a chance to look at what I usually don’t pay attention to when I’m enjoying the center of the road. It is said that speed reduces the field view. Not only that, but every perception is selectively enhanced according to our pragmatic interest. The dominant motorist pays attention to what is in the center of the road, and not to the margins where only what is left behind remains or, better said, is left aside. What you can find in the margins is actually quite interesting: gravels, pieces of glass, nails and screws, litter of every kind, and lots of carcasses. The shoulders are the realm of carcasses⁵: tire frames, sofa structures, and lots of animal carcasses, of course. When you start to pay attention to them, you find them everywhere, the presence of death several times a mile, announcing their presence with their stench, dead bodies without sepulchres, in contrast with the roadside cross symbolizing dead humans, warning other drivers with some mindful announce-

⁵ <https://usproject2016.com/2016/02/09/compagnons-de-bas-cotes/>.

ment, “drive carefully”. The cyclonaut notices that only humans seem to deserve sepulchres or memorials, while the killing of all other animals found on shoulders goes neglected, rejected out of any consideration – quite unfair indeed. These carcasses reveal the violence of the road, and of the motorized vehicles which power causes – well-named co-lateral damages.

Third teaching from the shoulders: by sharing this marginal position and the vulnerable situation of a non-motorized user of the road, crossing many “ghost bikes” like white memorials and ghostly silhouette of departed cyclists, I developed an unexpected compassion for those “shoulder companions”. This affective sense of community manifested itself as sadness and despair I felt when passing dead companions, as well as joy when I discovered weeds in the cracks, vividly contesting the concrete and resisting the odor of death floating all around. It was then that I realized that, as a cyclonaut, I belonged to an “off the road” community, a slow and fragile member of the non-motorized ecosystem. This recognition of an existing commonality, this shared space (and the affective response to its practical implications), yields the realization that we can actively cultivate a trans-species community. The experience of shoulder-wandering yields a broadened trans-species imaginary, experienced in an affective disposition of compassion (and other affective responses), that presumably is embodied in certain actions (attentiveness and care to the shoulder-dwellers, etc). This makes it a virtue ethic that encompasses perception, disposition, and action.

Being a proactive and engaging adventure, cycling across the country is an exploration of the margins, and therefore an experience of the social construction of space as a field as Bourdieu conceptualized it – i.e. as a system of social positions structured by power relationships (Bourdieu 1992; Hilgers and Mangez 2015). As a cyclonaut, shaped by an alternative perceptual and affective regime, I can feel and understand immediately the repressive effects of some kind of social domination, the violence of central powers over marginal inhabitants, the negligence of an anthropocentric instrumental value system. For example, when entering Los Angeles from the East, passing through suburban industrial areas, and leaving highway shoulders for bike lanes following the canalized Los Angeles River, I met my fellow cyclists who were mainly homeless people carrying their belongings on trailers, living under bridges and colonizing islands. Then going north along Highway 1, I regularly faced not only the winds but the aggressiveness of nervous drivers forgetting that the coastal road is narrow and that my vehicle was far more vulnerable than their trailers. The most charitable explanation is that they don’t know

how dangerous it is to be grazed by trucks, but, obviously, they neither paid attention to nor cared about my presence on the road. And, when stopping at a service area to refill my bottles with water, and reading the announcement warning people of rattlesnakes, I realized that the analogous signs potentially announcing “rattlesnakes in danger crossing the roads” did not exist and that no one was counting dozens of crushed snakes lying down on Highway 1’s shoulders. Being a minority fosters attentiveness to other minorities, thereby broadening one’s field of vision.

2.3. Environmental disconnection

One main difference between traveling in an enclosed car and traveling by bike is the connection with the elements. I was not observing the landscape behind the window, I was part of it. So, in general (a partial exception made perhaps for cabriolets), engine culture tends to isolate people from the environment. Like the enclosed helmet of motor-bikers suggests, it is easier to be an “ego in a bubble” on a motorbike or in a motorcar than on a bicycle. Even when practicing motor sports in nature, the position is a strange “in but out” relationship with the environment, as if one wanted to be in but one still manage to be out, enjoying the environment filtered through the engine’s speed, power and whine. Going along the Pacific Coast Trail in California, two examples of this “schizophrenic” model of motorized outdoor recreation struck me. The first one was the Oceano Dunes State Vehicular Recreation Areas⁶, a motorized vehicle dedicated beach. Trucks, buggies, quads and RVs are driving along the beach. The dune is full of traces, like scarves on a soft matter. The speed is limited at 15 miles per hour, checked by radar, but the noise seems to cover the sound of the waves. Some pedestrians are walking between the roaring vehicles, breathing the exhaust gas. I saw people comparing their “diesel”, displaying their trucks on the beach. The power of their engines seemed to captivate all their attention. Were they aware of being evolving in a marvelous environment⁷?

The second one was the Chandelier Redwood Tree Drive-Through near Leggett. It’s a tourist attraction that offers you to take a picture of

⁶ “This off-road area is among the most popular and unique of California State Parks. The 5 1/2 miles of beach open for vehicle use and the sand dunes available for off highway motor vehicle recreation are attractions for visitors from throughout the United States” (https://www.parks.ca.gov/?page_id=406).

⁷ Cf. <https://usproject2016.com/2016/06/10/guadalupe-piedras-blancas/>.

you driving your car through a millenary giant sequoia⁸. As a cyclist, I wonder what kind of culture can make the action of driving through a tree, a desirable experience? You don't see the tree, you see information about its age, height, diameter and then you take a picture, not of the tree but of yourself penetrating a living being as a motorist. As far as I am concerned, it gives a clear image of a delusional anthropocentrism that aims to be controlling, dominant, separated from nature instead of taking care of it within the frame of "partnership ethics" (Merchant 1996; Plumwood 2002). Environmental impacts of cars on a beach or on sand hills are disastrous. The Chandelier tree shows an admirable resilience but is weakened. But most of all, driving on the beach, keeps you away from breathing the ocean, feeling the sand under your feet, watching the horizon far away, observing seaweeds and shells. By driving through a tree, you cannot see neither the unique shapes of its branches nor the top of its majestic presence, you cannot embrace its tortuous bark, you cannot smell the spicy sap, you cannot observe ants and birds. In both cases, I wonder if the natural environment does not tend to become a pretext for egotistic excitements, where comparison between engines and cars are more important than connecting with the tree or the beach living ecosystem.

2.4. *The motorcentric urban infrastructure*

As a cyclist, vulnerable, looking for safety in the urban traffic, you become a kind of "urban bike facilities" expert. Ed Deaton, an environmental activist, pedestrian and bicycle advisor for Tallahassee City Council, showed me two big multi-level parking lots on Florida University Campus dedicated to the students' cars. He told me that this investment was debated, and, with this money, they could have bought bicycles for every able-bodied student of Tallahassee AND built bike lanes! I realized that choices in urban infrastructure were not only a matter of money, but firmly a matter of political decisions which in turn reflect underlying value systems that overwhelmingly favor large investments in car facilities. By contrast, cities such as Portland and Vancouver have engaged in a green revolution, developing miles of bike lanes and other facilities to enhance cyclist urban transportation. One major event symbolizing this "eco-mobility" awareness is the World Naked Bike Ride. In Port-

⁸ Cf. <https://usproject2016.com/2016/07/06/pacific-road-abalone-point-burlington-hike-and-bike-camp/>.

land, for instance, this event gathers more than 10,000 naked cyclists, crossing the city at night for a unique procession. Not merely an exotic emancipatory parade, this event connects the pleasure of riding a bike with political claims: playing with what is common decency to reveal the indecent exposure of cyclist to the traffic dangers and the outrageous exposure of the society to environmental and political dependency on a car-dominated culture. Beyond the iconoclast gesture, it is a way to raise awareness about the organization of public space. Public space is not only shared space, but contested space – space subject to conflictual usage. The problem is not merely how to share the space but also how to prevent any uses of public space that could exclude others' possibilities to evolve in that public space. In this respect, this event addresses the theme of individual and collective liberty: the over-exposed vulnerability of cyclists, through the analogous exposed bodies, promotes an alternative urban policy that values care, attention, listening, awareness of the weakest.

As a cyclonaut, I thus become aware of the hegemonic norms of a motorculture. Because I don't observe these norms, I contest their necessity, in a way. Because I build a new *habitus*, I can realize what was hidden by the usual and massive conformity to the car-driven society. First, the amount of energy the average human body can develop is forgotten, and we usually adopt as a need the driver or passenger roles that rely on a stunning dependency to fossil fuels⁹. Second, people usually don't realize how public space is designed around the hegemonic use of cars. The allowance of new ecomobilities demands we rethink the organization of space, which is also an organization of social power. Third, we don't realize how much a car tends to disconnect us from the environment and promotes a phallogocentric culture of dominating nature. Fourth, we usually don't appreciate how dangerous a car can be toward others roads-dwellers; people generally don't know how vulnerable a cyclist is, especially an urban cyclist.

Thus, this cyclonaut's perspective brings positive insights as a phenomenological analysis of motorcentrism. It reintroduces levels of consciousness (sensitive, ethical and political), typically neglected in the *status quo*. What about the positive practical alternative that the cyclonaut's experiment promotes, especially in the context of multiple environmental crises?

⁹ This, of course, does not include disabled people with very specific needs that have to be addressed.

I argue that, from an environmental virtue ethics standpoint, a cyclonaut's experience promotes a new paradigm for mobility based on the re-appropriation of autonomous movement that broadens our social imagination. It also promotes positive transformations of value system that enables an example of a rich experience. Contrary to the current irrational waste of energy, cycling can promote a joyfulness that reconnects us with the fundamental aspects of existence – self-awareness, connectivity to the world, nature, and beauty.

3. CONTRIBUTION TO ENVIRONMENTAL VIRTUE ETHICS

3.1. *Awareness of the Self*

While travelling by bicycle and moreover riding alone, I become very sensitive and very aware of what is going on inside myself. As I am using my body daily to move, I develop a fine perception of my changing balance of powers: I can feel whether I am in shape or not, and the slight variations of energy throughout the day of cycling, but also on a larger scale along the trip. I feel the pains and the signals that my body generates to inform me on how to adapt my effort: when to drink, when to eat, when to stop. Even if I do not search for performance, I can feel how my body adapts to endurance. The normality becomes to move constantly and not to stay still in a place. Therefore, I feel some discomfort when a pause leaves me inactive for a while. Sensation, emotions and energy dynamics are thus part of my daily activity and become essential parts of my vital process. So being a cyclonaut is one means to becoming very present to a body's life.

As far as I'm concerned, while cycling all day long, I became very mindful, especially about my stream of consciousness. I could feel mental activity's variations: from rehashing¹⁰ to silence, passing through reminiscences, reveries, and the emergence of new ideas. Thus, cycling can easily become a spiritual path. The reason for that is simple: as you cycle, it becomes really difficult not to be aware of your breathing. But, many spiritual paths recognize breathing as a central aspect of the practice. Therefore, while cycling, it is easy to feel that I am in a favorable practice

¹⁰ What Zen master Thich Nhat Hanh calls metaphorically “a radio called NST, Non-Stop Thinking!” (Nhat Hanh 2015).

to become present to what is going on within my body and within my mind. I can feel how I open myself to the world and how I can find a space to be present to myself, to others, to the world and to life.

As I reconquer an autonomous way of moving and adopt a nomadic life, I eventually realize that freedom is not the absence of constraint, but rather the ability to affirm actively some norms in which I can recognize myself. A feeling of joy arises due to intensification of one's vital experience, reconnection with nature and mindful relationships with oneself, with others and the world. I experiment what Arne Næss describes as ecological self-realization – opposed to ego-trips:

The meaning of life, and the joy we experience in living, is enhanced through increased self-realization, that is, through the fulfillment of potentials that each of us has, but that are never the same for any two living beings. Whatever the differences between beings, increased self-realization implies a broadening and deepening of the self. (Næss 2008, 82)

“Broadening and deepening the self” means, to Næss, going beyond the identification of the self to ego or social self, going beyond the dualistic separation of the self and the world, and experiencing the intertwined relationships with all the other beings that constitute our real Self.

3.2. Environmental awareness

The cyclonaut perspective not only provides self-awareness but also environmental awareness, that may implement this self-realization as “ecological self” (Næss 2008).

First, travelling by bicycle immediately immerses us in the environment. Like a sailor, a paraglider or an alpinist, our movements rely on meteorological conditions, especially winds, temperatures and precipitations. Feeling the winds, adapting myself to temperature's changes, protecting myself from rains and snow, or sun and heat, breathing all day long a changing air and drinking more than 1 gallon of water per day, I develop an extreme sensitivity to the quality of the different environments I am exposed to: I can feel the differences in air quality, water quality, silence quality. One feels how unbreathable the contaminated air of a crowded highway is, or around a refinery, a tree nursery constantly sprayed, or an industrial animal farm, as opposed to the crisp air of the Jemez mountains in New Mexico or the salty air of the Oregonian coast. While drinking new water several times a day, one can taste the chemical treatments in it. Environmental variations constantly affect the cyclist.

One can be saddened by the way humans neglect their environment and their common necessities. By contrast, after a hot day in the Californian mountains, a sip of fresh water coming from a stream becomes pure bliss.

One of the most precious experiences of being a cyclonaut is the resynchronization with cosmic and circadian rhythms, particularly the sunrise and the sunset. They are not only breaks or activity signals. These are promises of wonder and beauty, every day. As a cyclonaut, you realize your presence to the environment's beauty, to the surrounding, to what is welcoming you for a night or an instant: earth, plants, animals. It is like a daily appointment with our common home. The affective communion with this ecosystem, developed here by the daily outside movement and the immersion in and dependence on the environment that it implies, goes beyond anthropocentrism, because we value what we are part of, and we no longer identify with a "hyper-separated" (Plumwood 2002) human culture. As an outdoor person, I become very aware of my vulnerable companions, on the side of the road and around my campsites. How many dead animals on the shoulders? How much plastic on this beach? How much littering in this forest? During the journey, I developed a strong sense of belonging to this ecological community, and all those relationships were affecting me at sensory and emotional levels. I would argue that this is a structural aspect of the cyclonaut's experience. Because you are evolving within the environment and with the elements, you do not feel separated and, therefore, you can recognize yourself within the living community you belong to and open up to the beauty of your surrounding and the beauty within ¹¹.

3.3. Broadening social imagination and alternative value system

Practical habits and norms, implemented in the cyclonaut's way of life, can promote a value system as an alternative to productivity and consumerism inherent to neoliberal capitalism. Of course, while riding his bike a cyclonaut is not writing a political manifesto. Nevertheless, he is implementing a value system, even minor, which can join other social and political experiments like "alternative places for social experimentation" that I call "ecotopies" ¹². Thus, the value system which is realized by the

¹¹ "The 'everything hangs together' maxim of ecology applies to the self and its relation to other living beings, ecosystems, the ecosphere, and the earth, with its long history" (Næss 2008, 87).

¹² An "ecotopy" is a place where people are resisting, through imagination and action, to the hegemonic capitalist system and are inventing new relationships with

cyclonaut's way of life takes place in a multi-locational rhizomatic (or "weedy", after Callenbach 2009) movement contesting the hegemonic norms of capitalistic consumerist systems. As an interlocking network of alternative value systems, these eco-movements broaden the social imagination for how human beings live in and with their environments.

I will focus on two dimensions of these ethical effects of being a cyclonaut: voluntary simplicity and mindfulness. Those attitudes and the norms that they promote are not arbitrary. They emerge from very simple, practical and material conditions which are the daily practice of being a cyclonaut. They are part of the ordinary cyclonaut's practical and theoretical imagination.

3.3.1. Voluntary simplicity

Traditional virtues like temperance are being reappropriated in the West in response to contemporary environmental crises as values of voluntary simplicity and sobriety. In a way, "voluntary simplicity" – or "voluntary sobriety" as Arnsperger and Bourg (2017) prefer to say – reactivates western traditions of auto-limitation, to address the anthropological and sociological problem of unlimited desire, which lead to excessive ecological footprints in western capitalist societies. But, "Voluntary sobriety is meaningful only as a differential and transitional concept: to choose deliberately moderation, frugality or autolimitation is questioning and overcoming a dominant way of life where waste and excess are ruling" (Arnsperger and Bourg 2017, 107). Gorz was already seeing "autolimitation" as an "ecosocial project" (Gorz [1992] 2008, 65) seeking the "sufficiency norm" ["norme de suffisance"] (Gorz [1992] 2008, 61) which can't exist in the capitalistic growth oriented system. Voluntary simplicity is thus a critical concept but also a positive way to affirm that capitalist values of accumulating possessions are not fulfilling their goals of fully realizing human potential or meaning in life.

As a cyclonaut, you carry with you all you need to be safe and autonomous in terms of water, food, clothes, camping gear. You can't stock extra "stuff" because everything you carry weighs extra kilos that cost you extra effort on every single pedal push. Since everything has a weight that will affect your movement, you ask yourself: "what do I really need?". There-

nature. That's a "singular collective" concept that can relate places as different as ecovillages, national parks, urban farms, philosophy departments, ... This concept, inspired by E. Callenbach particularly in one of his last lectures, was a key concept in the *Untaking Space Project*. Cf. Callenbach 2009; Delorme and Tedde 2016.

fore, the needless accumulation of “stuff” becomes a very clear realization that connects to a more minimal way of life. As far as I’m concerned, I progressively got rid of fears that tend to make me carry more stuff than I really needed. I could physically feel what it meant to have an ecological weight and I felt the freedom to be light on earth, while moving or dwelling for a night in sites that welcomed me.

3.3.2. Mindfulness

Every day, as a cyclonaut, I could realize that spiritual values like admiring a sunset, being present to the beauty of a tree or to the solitude of an old man in a small village in Texas became clearly much more important than what is usually valued in the capitalist-consumerist system (like possessing things and showing his power or success). Thus, the enduring question of what is essential in life receives an answer when you go back to some kind of nomadic way of life within our modern societies: “stuff” is overcrowding, and if you go light you will discover real excitement and real joy every time you feel present, connected, active, free, overwhelmed by beauty and generosity. This is where, I think, a cyclonaut’s experience connects with mindfulness. Not only are you breathing, and connected to the environment, but the effort puts you in some state of silence and full *présence*¹³ to every sensation, emotion and thoughts arising. Thich Nhat Hanh (2015) describes mindfulness in this poem:

*The practice of mindfulness is
very simple.
You stop, you breathe, and you still your mind.
You come home to yourself so
that you can enjoy the here and
now in every moment.*

So, mindfulness is a meditative state of consciousness which aims to still the body, emotions and mind (full of fears, memories and projections), to enjoy being fully in the here and now. Full presence is not only a gate to real joy, it’s also silence or space to be sensitive to “beauty’s call” everywhere.

All the wonders of life are already here. They’re calling you. If you can listen to them, you will be able to stop running. What you need, what we

¹³ The french word “présence” is interesting in its polysemy because it means at the same time, the phenomenological awareness to the present things, but also the temporal *hic et nunc*, here and now. Both aspects are related in mindfulness.

all need, is silence. Stop the noise in your mind in order for the wondrous sounds of life to be heard. Then you can begin to live your life authentically and deeply. (Nhat Han 2015)

As I described before (2.1), mindful cycling is an easy practice because the cyclonaut spends a lot of time by himself. Mindfulness brings wonderment, and wonderment brings joy. This joy has a very special flavor for the cyclonaut, who in many ways engages himself, feels his limits and feels fully alive, since at the threat of the road every day, he can feel his vulnerability. Thus, living, breathing, moving freely, enjoying peace and beauty has a taste of the miraculous at every instant. It does not mean that he goes beyond natural order, but rather that he becomes aware, within all these living relationships and stories, that his daily vital process relies on a very fragile balance that warrants wonderment.

4. CONCLUSION

One who crosses the US, from Southeast to Northwest, enters the road trip imaginary. Today, this is mainly a modern motorcentric imaginary. Choosing the cyclonaut's perspective is a way to question this hegemonic cultural pattern, and while travelling cross-country, as a vulnerable nomadic cyclist, one produces some kind of distortion in the usual road trip imaginary. This critical insight affords a possibility of an alternative value system. Dependence on fossil fuel for mobility, motorcentric organization of space and the disconnection of motorcentric urban infrastructure from the environment reveal themselves as contingent, historical, politically built choices, unsustainable as far as ecological crisis is concerned. Even if we assume that in twenty years, all cars will be electric, most of the eco-social constraints of motor-centricity will remain. The cyclonaut's perspective offers an opportunity to reconnect with the moving body and mind, with the environment, with the vulnerability of our existence and with the joy of belonging to this community of Gaia's co-inhabitants. Here, behavioral and normative changes to face the environmental crisis are not due to an abstract rational decision about what is morally good or wrong, nor on a consequentialist reasoning about our interests. New experiences, working on the radical level of affects, sensations and emotions, produce transformations in ethical behaviors because the *Self* has changed. Becoming more aware, more present, more connected, in a word, wiser, the cyclonaut tends to resist anthropocentric attitudes like the modern tendency to separate ourselves from nature in

order to dominate and instrumentalize it. This, therefore, broadens social practical and theoretical imagination toward new relationships with ourselves, the fellow co-inhabitants of our “écoumène” (Berque 2004) – which means our intertwined social and natural environment – and our desires. It promotes a virtue ethic of voluntary simplicity and mindfulness in response to ecological issues, at a very personal level. Being a cyclonaut is one way of being fully alive, feeling miraculously alive and becoming aware of horrors and beauties all around while passing by, briefly, on Earth. As we face a global environmental crisis and the confusion it produces, cycling around may be a good start.

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